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Lambda Letters Project

32578

Vol. 4, No. 5 May, 1996 6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, California 95608 Phone (916) 965-6851

State of the Project '96

This address was given by Boyce Hinman, Administrator of the Lambda Letters Project, at the Annual Meeting on April 20th.

In this presentation I will be reviewing where Lambda Letters began, where it is now, and where I think it can go. I will also be discussing changes that I think are necessary to get there.

Where and When Did We Begin?

The Project was the brainchild of Larry Beaty and myself. It resulted from our disappointment when Congress ignored the 1987 March on Washington. Just days after that march, Congress passed legislation seriously undermining the effectiveness of publicly funded AIDS-awareness materials.

Larry and I spent almost a year finding people to help us launch the Project. Finally, in September of 1988, it was started as a committee of the River City Democratic Club. We collected 900 letters in 1988 and 1,700 letters in the following year. At this time our letters covered lesbian/gay issues, women's issues, and AIDS/HIV issues. We had no newsletter. Background articles on the issues we covered were informal documents mailed with the sample letters. We had only the letters (no Lambdagrams or e-mail alerts) and our process

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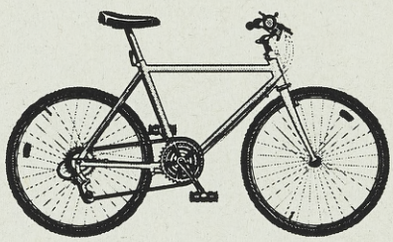
Attend Yolo County Gay Pride Day in Davis

The first annual Yolo County Gay Pride Day will be held at Central Park (corner of 5th and B Streets) in Davis on June 9th from 11–5. Bring your own picnic; there will be no food or drinks available (no glass bottles, please).

The event is free and features entertainment for both children and adults, including musicians Judy Fjell and Duval Speck, and dance instruction with John Batchelor.



The picnic is for all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and straight (but not narrow) people to celebrate gay pride. The event commemorates the 10th anniversary of the Davis Civil Rights Ordinance, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

To volunteer, or for more information, call Ellen Pontac at (916) 753-8283.

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Lambda Letters Progress Report

Letters Collected

March, 1996	6,196 letters
In all of 1996	20,834 letters

Dollars Spent

March, 1996	$1,409
In all of 1996	$5,600

Can You Help?

Please support the very important work of the Lambda Letters Project with your contributions.

This newsletter printed on recycled paper

The Lambda Letters Newsletter is published monthly except in December by the Lambda Letters Project Inc., 6212 Silverton Way, Carmichael, CA 95608. Postmaster: send address changes to the address above.

Lambda Letters Project

Statement of Purpose

To promote people of color, feminist, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV/AIDS status advocacy and to bring people of color, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered persons, and persons affected by or living with HIV/AIDS into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof.

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Publication of the name of any person or organization in articles or advertising in the Lambda Letters Project newsletter is not to be construed as any indication of the sexual orientation of such person or organization.

Confidentiality

The Lambda Letters Project does not sell or loan its mailing list to anyone. We give no information about who is, or is not, a member of the Project. We do, occasionally, send mailings on behalf of other worthwhile organizations, but this is done by our own volunteers so that no other organization has the opportunity to copy our mailing lists.

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Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Issue

The President's Thorn

"The Thorn in his Side" was the headline in an April 2nd *Advocate* article on the U.S. military's aggressive enforcement of their policy on gays in the armed forces, formally referred to as the "Don't Ask, Don't tell, Don't Pursue, Don't Harass" policy. The *Advocate* article noted that this issue could prove to be a headache for the president in his reelection campaign. The active pursuit of gays in the armed forces was raised in a report released by the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) in February.

The SLDN report reveals that the 722 service members discharged in 1995 under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was up 21 percent over the previous year (597) and is the highest number of gays discharged in the past four years. The report also disclosed that during the period from March 1, 1995, through February 27, 1996, the U.S. military violated the policy 363 times. In 1994–95 the policy was violated 340 times.

Violations occurred under four different categories, where service members have been:

- Asked about their sexual orientation
- Punished for making statements about sexual orientation that are permissible
- Subject to witch hunts or criminal prosecution because of their suspected sexual orientation
- Subject to continuing harassment based upon perceived sexual orientation

While Secretary of Defense William Perry has ordered an investigation into possible abuses and has promised that the report will be taken seriously, Defense officials have already stated that the Admin-

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Women's Issue

Opposing Anti-abortion Bills

Back in January, we sent a letter to President Clinton urging him to veto the Partial Birth Abortion Ban. Our efforts were successful—upon receiving our letters and hearing from many other pro-choice groups, the president did, in fact, veto the House version of that bill on April 10th. Thanks for all your signatures!

Now there are currently two State bills in the Assembly and the State Senate which propose to do the same thing: S.B. 1999, introduced by Senator Ray Haynes (R–Riverside), and A.B. 2984, introduced by Assemblymember Bob Margett (R–Glendora). S.B. 1999 has been stalled in the Senate Committee on Health. A.B. 2984 has passed the Committees on Health and Public Safety and is currently sitting in the Committee on Appropriations. We expect it to clear that committee before our letters arrive—so this month's letter is directed to our Assemblymembers and will arrive before the floor vote.

A.B. 2984 bans late-term, partial-birth abortions, except when the doctor can *prove* that there was no other way to save a woman's life—a nearly impossible burden of proof. It also opens the door for civil suits against doctors who use this procedure, and imposes mandatory fines and possible license suspension. There are many groups opposing this bill, arguing that such complex medical decisions should not be decided by legislation.

The following groups have registered their opposition:

- California Medical Association
- Planned Parenthood Association of California

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HIV/AIDS Issue

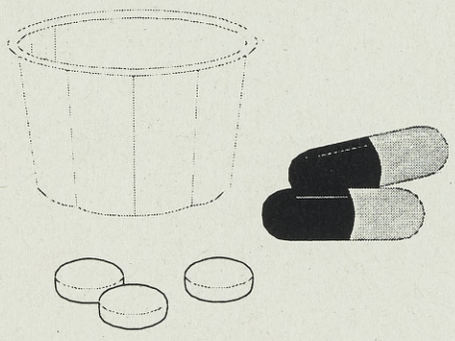
Increasing Budget of State AIDS Drug Assistance Program

In February we wrote to Governor Wilson asking him to allow the State Department of Health Services to add 3TC (Epivir) and saquinavir (Invirase), two recently FDA-approved drugs, to the formulary of California's AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), as well as to cover a projected ADAP budget deficit and the cost of these new drugs.

This was a request for immediate action. The state budget for 1996–97 is now being considered by the Legislature, and the Assembly has voted to consider in conference committee (rather than on the floor) all requests for budgetary augmentations to which the Senate has already agreed.

The Senate has agreed to an $11 million augmentation for ADAP, which would cover the cost of four new AIDS treatment drugs (including 3TC and saquinavir), as well as allow the program to pay for all people who are expected to be eligible for its benefits during 1996–97.

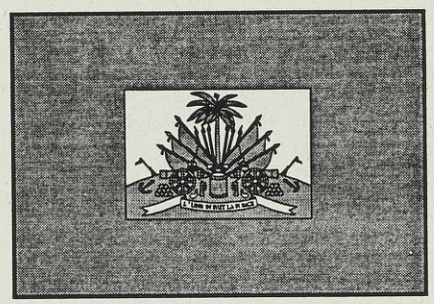
For this reason, we are writing all Assemblymembers this month, asking them to convey the importance of this budget augmentation to the voting members of the Budget Committee and, of course, to vote for the final budget on the Assembly floor once it contains these items.



People of Color Issue

Disney, J.C. Penney Illegally Profiteering in Haiti

We probably all reasonably assume that trade agreements between countries are mutually beneficial in the long run. Even where the relative wealth of the participants is lopsided, as is the case of the United States and its Latin American neighbors, we trust that there will be reciprocal sharing of entrepreneurial rewards and risks. We might even venture to think that poor countries stand to receive the greater benefits and suffer the lesser risks in such arrangements. However, a recent report from the National Labor Committee (NLC), a workers-right group affiliated with textile unions in the United States, points out that how these international transactions play out on a human level is often a case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.



The NLC reported in a news bulletin dated January 30, 1996, that Americans and Haitian contractors producing Mickey Mouse and Pocahontas pajamas for U.S. retailers under license with the Walt Disney Company are in some cases paying workers as little as one dollar per day—12 cents per hour—in

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A Federal Budget at Last (Until October)

During the week of April 21st, Congress finally passed, and President Clinton signed, legislation to fund the federal government until October, 1996. While this budget is a mixed one, there are some victories for us, including the removal of the Dornan provision requiring discharge of HIV+ members from the armed forces. Of course, Representative Dornan (R–CA) is going to reintroduce this provision when 1997 military appropriations come up, but hopefully this time it will be stopped in the initial committee. In addition, the Ryan White CARE Act received an increase of $105.5 million over FY1995 and the regionally-based AIDS Education and Training Centers were saved from a planned complete elimination and funded $12 million instead! Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) was funded at the 1995 level of $171 million, which is actually a victory since the vast majority of federally funded housing programs received cuts. Funding for 1996–97 is still a battle to be fought, and with November's elections looming ahead we are making no predictions. In addition, reauthorization of the Ryan White CARE Act for 1996–97 and thereafter is still languishing in a conference committee.

Update on the Same-Sex Marriage Bill

A.B. 1982, introduced by Assemblymember Knight (R), passed the Assembly in January. This bill states that same-sex marriages will not be recognized in California even if they occurred legally in another state, such as Hawaii. The bill has been sitting in the Senate Judiciary Committee since early February with no action being taken on it. It still has no scheduled hearing date. That may be good news. We'll keep you posted.

Meanwhile, Assemblymember Knight has introduced another bill, A.B. 3227. This bill declares that the Legislature shall find that marriage law applies *only* to male–female couples. That bill is scheduled to be heard in the Assembly Judiciary Committee on May 8th. Again, we will keep you posted.

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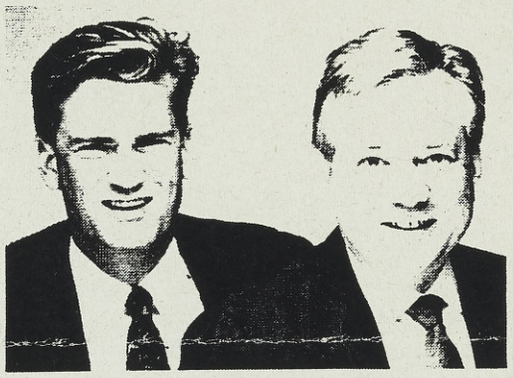

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State of the Project

Continued from page 1

was slow, so we had no way of responding to fast-breaking legislative issues. We had to hope that a vote on an issue we were gathering letters for did not occur before we could deliver the signed letters!

In April of 1988, I removed the Project from the River City Democratic Club. I did so because the people from the club who were working on the Project were frequently missing deadlines for letters and articles. That didn't seem to bother anyone and the Project was in danger of dying. It's worth noting that many of our community's organizations that existed in Sacramento in 1989 are now gone. Probably these same attitudes were major causes of their demise.

In the meantime, Lambda Letters continued to grow, often doubling the number of letters collected each year. At first, most of our members were from the Sacramento area. We also had not incorporated or gotten our tax-exempt status. I was literally reporting the Project's income as hobby income and paying taxes on that income! In many ways the Project was simply a hobby of mine and of a few close friends.

Where Is Lambda Letters Now?

Now, in 1996, Lambda Letters has a respected newsletter. We are a tax-exempt corporation and we are experimenting with e-mail, Lambdagrams, and letters from the Administrator to legislators to respond to fast-breaking issues. In the first three months of 1996 we collected over 20,000 letters. We will probably collect over 46,000 letters by the end of this year.

Meanwhile, we have established a reputation for professionalism and effectiveness. Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl says, "Our community has several excellent lobbyists working to protect our rights. However, their message has limited influence on legislators unless it is supported by large volumes of letters, telegrams, and phone calls from voters to the legislators who represent them. Lambda Letters is the *only* organization providing that kind of support for our lobbyists in Sacramento."

Jessea Greenman, Director of the P.E.R.S.O.N. Project (a project for gay youth), says "Lambda Letters has been a very effective mechanism, generating hundreds of letters, in a timely fashion, from all parts of the state. As such, Lambda Letters is an important agent of change for advancement of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transsexual rights. Their work supplements, and is every bit as important as that of the LIFE Lobby."

What Is in Our Future?

By the end of this year, I expect to have collected roughly 173,000 letters since our founding in 1988. By the end of next year we will be approaching the 250,000 mark. That is one quarter of a million letters, folks, and it is clear that we could be having a marked influence on the legislative issues that affect our community.

However, to be *really* influential we have to grow even more, and that is going to require

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Green Grass Believers

by John Helm

Northwest Publishing ($9.95)

An autobiography of two gay men, John and Sonny, and their 25 years together.

Can be ordered at any major bookstore.

State of the Project

Continued from page 6

changes in our structure and mode of operation. We need to enlarge our Board and staff and we need to ask that every Board and staff member make a significant and professional contribution to the Project. It's the difference between viewing Lambda Letters as the hobby of a few interested friends and seeing it as a business that must be professionally run.

Currently, we have six volunteer staff members. All but two of them are employed full-time in another occupation, and one is a full-time student. We cannot reasonably expect such a staff to run the kind of operation that Lambda Letters is becoming. We need more staff.

I also believe it is necessary to blur the distinction between Board and staff and get each Board member involved in a major activity of the Project. We need everyone on this Board and staff to find a niche that they can fill, in which they provide a major service to the Project. Each of us should assume we will commit 10–20 hours per month to some activity that suits our talents and interests. Those tasks would be our niches. Then we must determine which important niches have not been filled and work together to find people to fill them. I believe we must have this kind of commit-

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You Are All Wonderful!

Last month we asked you to support a bill (S.B. 1964, Marks) that would ban discrimnination against transgendered and transexual persons. If you read the article called "Who Are the Lions?" in last month's newsletter, you know that I feared that many of our members would consider this bill too controversial and that they would not support it.

Happily, I was proven wrong. As of this date, we have collected over 550 letters in support of this bill. Thank you so much.

S.B. 1964 is to be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 7th. We will let you know in our June newsletter how the committee voted on the bill.

Boyce Hinman
Administrator

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A Second AIDS Analyst Is Needed . . .

Recently someone volunteered to replace Joe Heller as our AIDS analyst. Unfortunately, this volunteer's work schedule requires him to work with someone in composing our monthly HIV/AIDS newsletter articles and sample letters. Are you that person?

This second volunteer should have good writing skills, and will spend about 10 hours each month researching possible subjects and composing sample letters and articles for our newsletter. The volunteer also must attend a monthly, two- to three-hour staff meeting in which each month's subjects are chosen and other important business of the Project is accomplished. Staff meetings are held on weekends and rotate between locations in the Sacramento and Oakland areas.

The Project can provide leads on how to find suitable subjects and advice on writing, if needed. This is a great opportunity for you to influence the subjects we cover. Please consider volunteering for this important position, or help us find the person to do it. A travel allowance can be provided to cover the cost of travelling to and from staff meetings. If you are interested, please send us a note with your letters or call Boyce Hinman at (916) 965-6851. If you have e-mail, you can send a message to LambdaLP@aol.com.

. . . also a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Analyst!

Our current analyst is withdrawing because of other work commitments. However, he has generously agreed to stay on until we can find his replacement. Please see the previous article seeking an AIDS analyst. The job requirements are the same. Please consider accepting this assignment. We have a great bunch of volunteers who are fun to work with and you will be doing a great service for the community. If you are interested, please send us a note with your letters or call Boyce Hinman at (916) 965-6851. If you have e-mail, you can send a message to LambdaLP@aol.com.

State of the Project

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ment from all concerned, or Lambda Letters will begin to fade as the workload becomes too heavy for the few most directly involved in the work of the Project.

So what are the empty niches? Clearly, we need someone to work exclusively on fund-raising. That person should have committees of people assigned to manage our various fund-raising activities, such as the auction, Entertainment Book and calendar sales, etc. That kind of consistent effort is needed to provide the financial base for growth.

We also need a Person of Color Coordinator, someone to help us build bridges to that community and increase the presence of people of color among our members and on the Board.

We need a Public Relations Coordinator, someone to assure that we get the consistent, positive publicity that we need to grow. He or she would be in charge of general publicity about the Project, as well as targeted publicity to gain new members in the legislative districts in which we need to grow and become more influential. A Public Relations Coordinator would also be very helpful in advertising our various fund-raising efforts and in helping us reach out to people of color.

Finally, we need a new Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Analyst to write our monthly articles and sample letters on that subject. Our current analyst has announced that he must step down soon because of other commitments.

These are just a few of the areas of greatest need. At any rate, I think Lambda Letters has great potential and I hope you will join with me in assuring that that future is fully realized.

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President's Thorn

Continued from page 3

istration expressed confidence that the policy was working as intended. The *Advocate* article quotes White House spokesperson David Johnson as saying, "Defense officials have investigated complaints in the past and made changes when found wrongdoing. But, that's been very, very *few* incidents."

Its no secret that the Clinton reelection effort once again is seeking the support of the lesbian and gay community, as it did in 1992. Just this month, the president met with lesbian and gay leaders to discuss issues important to our community. Just as important, President Clinton realizes he must carry California if he is to win a second term of office. Now is the time to let him know that we do not believe there have been "very, very *few*" incidents of wrongdoing by the military in its enforcement of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. Let him know that you are outraged by his aggressive expulsion of gays in the military after hailing the policy when implemented as a way for gays to serve their country. Let him know that you will be watching to see the results of Secretary Perry's investigation and that your vote will be influenced by the president's actions on this issue.

We have enclosed a sample letter for your use. We encourage you to write your own personalized letter. However, if time does not permit, you may sign the sample letter and return it to us.

Opposing Anti-abortion Bills

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- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- National Council of Jewish Women
- American Civil Liberties Union
- California Reproductive Health Association
- California Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League
- American Association of University Women, California
- California League of Women Voters

Such an important decision should be made within the medical community and, in the end, between a woman and her doctor. It should not be made by politicians. Please sign this month's letter urging your Assemblymember to oppose this cruel bill.

Illegal Profiteering

Continued from page 4

clear violation of the Haitian minimum wage law, which requires workers to be paid $2.40 per day. The pajamas are sold in Wal-Mart, Sears, and J.C. Penney stores for $12 a set.

Ninety-nine percent of the people of Haiti live in abject poverty and there is a desperate need for economic development, but this exploitation of poor people seems gratuitously ruthless when you consider that even at a minimum wage of $2.40 per day, a Haitian worker could expect only the barest subsistence.

The NLC report reminded us that Michael Eisner, the Chief Executive Officer of the Walt Disney Company, was paid an annual salary of $8,029,000 in 1994 and William Howell, CEO of the J.C. Penney Company, was paid $2,445,267 in 1994. One would expect that these high salaries reward a wide range of leadership qualities. Lambda Letters Project members are urged to write to these men in an appeal to their sense of fairness and respect for the law.

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